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THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE[1]

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Before we can discuss the achievements and shortcomings of the American college, it is desirable to indicate the point of view and the standards by which the college is to be judged. The college of liberal arts, as distinguished from graduate and professional schools, is here to be considered. The mission of the college may be profitably considered under three main heads.

1. It is the primary function of the college to be a center of higher learning and lofty ideals. To this end it must assemble the material equipment and the scholarly men necessary for the higher learning and the propagation of the better social influences. It not only assembles these, but by original research and creative effort it contributes to their development.

2. The second important function of the college is to transmit to potential learners as effectively and economically as possible that learning and those ideals which have a genuine significance for the community life of the present or the future.

3. It is also the duty of the college to enlarge the range of its influence, to contribute of its treasures, not only to those who enter its gates, but to those who cannot, or are not yet disposed to, come under its influence. In other words, the college must interact on society by bringing itself into intimate and vital contact with the life of the times.

If, now, we seek to judge the work of the college from these three standpoints, it would seem that in the first field the college has been largely successful, in the other two less so. It will be recalled that the mediaeval university was essentially the gathering place of scholars and those inclined to scholarship.

[1] Read at the Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Association, Harvard University, March, 1910.

The American college similarly from the beginning has been an institution which has been successful in gathering together the equipment and men that could support and contribute to the higher learning. It has achieved popularity; it has become the center of an active and powerful, if not always wholesome, social life; and it has broadened its curriculum so as to open many doors to the aspiring student. Under the second head we note that it has made some advances in correlating its work with certain kinds of vocational preparation (especially for the professions); while in respect to the third division it has, within limits, done some conscious work in preparation for citizenship.

In 1889–90 there was reported to the National Bureau of Education the presence in American colleges of 44,900 men and 10,700 women students. In 1907–8 this number had increased to 101,200 men and 52,600 women, distributed in 573 institutions avowedly doing college work. To these students were granted in that year over 20,800 degrees, of which the women alone received 6,800. Of these institutions 464 had an income of over $66,000,000, of which the national government contributed $4,500,000, the states and municipalities over $15,000,000, and gifts $14,000,000. The rest came from fees, and from productive funds, the evidence of past or present esteem. Those who have followed the marvelous growth of western state institutions must realize what a hold these have on the citizenship of their respective commonwealths. In many states of the Union the college has become as vital and necessary a part of a system of free public schools as the high school or primary school. It is not here alleged that this popularity of the college is to be accepted as proof that it is satisfactorily attaining the social aims set for it, but it certainly is evidence that the college occupies an influential place in the corporate life of our people. It is not impossible, indeed, that the severe criticism to which the college is now being subjected is in part the outcome of this very esteem in which it is held by the public. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

Related to this public esteem is the fact that the college has achieved in increasing measure an enriched social life. How far

this development is indigenous to the student body need not here be discussed. In spite of certain excesses and mal-developments it nevertheless remains true that for the average American youth the college provides a splendid social environment, in which flourish several of the social qualities that make for enjoyment and some kinds of social efficiency later. There is almost as much wisdom as irony in the mandate sometimes given to the college student, not to let his studies interfere with his college life. It must be confessed that we have yet made no adequate analysis of the social side of education or of the means to its realization; but in spite of this, the American college, perhaps largely through the efforts of its own students, has produced a rich and valuable social life, whose abuses I believe to be not inherent, but merely the consequence of lack of intelligent regulation of administration.

In the third place, it must be held as a distinct achievement of the American college that it has so widened its curriculum and so beaten back the old system of narrow restrictions as to make of it a more democratic institution and one more in harmony with the spirit of the twentieth century. In spite of our sometimes shortsighted criticisms of the elective system, it must nevertheless remain true that a twentieth-century institution of higher learning must open a large number of doors to the student. The American college has been forced to recognize that the mediaeval conception of learning as something for an aristocracy is not to be tolerated. The antiquated disposition to insist that this or that language, this or that science, or this or the other line of study in history or art is essential to a liberal education, has happily been banished to the limbo of the various other kinds of intolerance.

The fourth achievement of the American college is its growing capacity to co-ordinate its work with that of the professional school. In time we may expect that the sharp dividing line which has often existed between liberal and professional education will be removed and that the student will be able so to adjust his course that his liberal studies will contribute something to a professional foundation and at the same time that he will be

induced to spend a longer time in the atmosphere of liberal education.

We may note, finally, that in some degree the college has achieved results in conscious preparation for citizenship. It is true, of course, that the friends of the college have always put this forward as one of its controlling aims, but the critic has not been able to discern in the college work distinct means to its realization. No one could deny that many college teachers, and perhaps even more those of a former than of the present generation, have been very active factors through their personalities in producing the higher civic ideals. But it may be questioned as to how the traditional studies themselves contributed to the ends of citizenship. What is evident in the college of today is that a variety of the newer courses in economics, civics, history, and sociology, are almost controlled by their purposes of functional expression in contemporary life. When we add to these a variety of quasi-collegiate activities fostered by individual effort it may be acknowledged that we have the beginnings of some genuine social or civic education. It need not be mentioned here that certain women's colleges have conspicuously succeeded in this direction. It is also well within the knowledge of all that in a number of state universities and in non-public institutions in the East obvious results in this field are a matter of recent growth. While one hopes and believes that these are but the foreshadowings of much more important developments in the near future, in view of their importance we should even now put them down as among the distinctive achievements of the American college.

If, now, we turn from an enumeration of the achievements of the American college to consider its shortcomings, we shall be obliged to define these in terms of the demands and possibilities of twentieth-century democracy. We shall have to remember that our modern life is complicated along economic and social lines; that the age is one of transition; that the popular will is in the ascendent; that political democracy is slowly but certainly producing social and economic democracy. We shall have to remind ourselves that obvious efficiency, whether in cul-

tural or practical lines, is more and more demanded of educational efforts and that efficiency which is not accompanied by economy of effort is less and less admired. The agencies which can influence this modern social life must have an integral relation with it. There is no place in modern life for the palace of art on the hilltop. The man who is to teach those who are to go into active life must in some measure himself have been a learner from that active life. The institution which desires that its work shall be effective must constantly go to the world for contact with reality and must follow the results of its work into the world.

In the light of these considerations it would seem that the American college has yet measurably failed to realize its possibilities in the last two divisions given at the outset. On the one hand, it has continued to lack a scientific pedagogy or teaching-art by which it could be assured of efficiency and economy of effort. This lack of pedagogic insight has deprived it of proper criteria of educational values; has caused it to adhere to methods and procedures based on traditional subjects which have no functional value in modern life; and has rendered it impotent to develop a new methodology and administration suited to subjects which have contemporaneous cultural significance. On the other hand, the college has preserved a certain isolation from community life. This isolation has deprived it of the ability to enlarge its sphere of usefulness; has made its professors men of academic mind somewhat out of touch with the requirements and possibilities of modern culture; it has led to the notion that culture is something remote from the currents of present activity and something that is vulgarized by contact with them. The college has figured insufficiently as a force in political life and has even lent strength by its attitude to the notion that politics is an unclean trade which the refined and gentle-minded must avoid. But the isolation of the college and its indisposition to interact on contemporary life has been most harmful in its relations to the democratic movement for public education. So situated as to be in practical command of the standards of secondary education, it has greatly narrowed and formalized these

by its direct control through the imposed curricula and by its indirect control through the training of teachers for these schools. These general charges may be considered more in detail.

Pedagogy is the art of so presenting subject-matter that effectiveness and economy follow in the learning-process. Effectiveness and economy in this connection imply also that what is learned shall actually function in the results aimed at. Learning is not an end in itself, but a means to the realization of vital social and personal ends. Judged by this definition, it can hardly be said that the American college instructor has yet begun to think about the pedagogical art, or rather his thinking is so fragmentary and unorganized a process as to lead to little genuine advance. It is true that there have always been and can still be found great and effective teachers in the colleges; but these have been men of exceptional natural capacities, gifted with teaching-powers far beyond those of the average man. The college seeks these rare teachers who are strong in native ability, but has not learned the art of producing them. Furthermore, these exceptional men, strong in their intuitive powers, have had little capacity to impart the secrets of their success to their would-be disciples. It is more accurate to say, perhaps, that the study of the art of college teaching has centered in subject-matter rather than in the learning-processes of those taught. Traditionally the college may have aimed to be only an open door to learning; but, in fact, the youths who frequent such institutions have sought teachers no less than other opportunities of learning, and it is certainly true that effective teaching multiplies those who seek it and greatly enhances the social serviceableness of education. So far the college has produced almost no literature on the pedagogic art, viewed from the subjective standpoint. Very few studies, long or short, have been produced which could guide the novitiate in becoming an effective teacher of young people. As yet few researches in psychology serve to give us light. The college instructor has been loath to submit the results of his work to scientific test. He has often refused to assume any responsibility for the outcome of his work in the students who have passed through his classes. Not infrequently

it is a matter of indifference to him whether or not the education he gives actually functions in the culture, civic sense, or vocational power which is implied in the college announcement. It is perhaps true that this situation tends to grow worse in proportion as the old type of college teacher disappears and he is replaced by the specialist, whose interests are still bound up in subject-matter. So widespread is this condition that we must regard it as institutional rather than individual. The dean of one of our strong colleges recently published a complaint that the training of specialists and men for research is drying up the springs of genuine college teaching; and Professor Ganong has in a recent issue of *Science* asserted the same thing. It has been quite possible for this development to come about unnoticed because of the absence of any conscious standards of the art of teaching among college instructors.

It is not here asserted, of course, that in any field of education we have a well-developed pedagogy. Far from it. But we shall make little progress in developing such a field, until we have a body of people who believe that a genuine pedagogy is possible, and who are striving toward its realization. In other departments of education than the collegiate there is at the present time a widespread belief in the existence of such a pedagogy, and, however imperfectly, there are those who are striving to realize it. In the college, the prevailing attitude toward pedagogy has usually been one of contempt. This is conspicuous in the case of young instructors, whose attitude toward their students is that of the "take-it-or-leave-it" kind. Among these younger professors there is general agreement that it is not possible, by study and concerted attention to the problems of teaching, as distinguished from the problems of scientifically and logically organizing subject-matter, to establish principles that would be helpful to college education generally. Psychology, applied to the processes of instruction and training, is yet unexplored territory to them, and has the further disadvantage of being believed to be a utopia.

Apart from its influence on processes of college education, the absence of a philosophy of pedagogy in the college has reacted

most disastrously on the schools below. Because of their strategic position, the colleges have been able to dictate the standards and to control in large measure the administration of secondary education. Their sway in this field has been to a large extent unintelligent and exasperating, though entirely well meant. They have imposed standards that have been generally regarded by students of secondary education, who possess some pedagogic insight, as narrow, irrational, and unfruitful. These standards have often been highly elaborated from the standpoint of subject-matter, but one is tempted to say that in proportion as this has been the case, they have exhibited lack of understanding of the nature of adolescence and the social significance of a genuine secondary education.

It is not easy, and certainly seems ungracious, to make accusations of pedagogical shortcomings against the college in this connection, because so many of its efforts have been well intended. It has undoubtedly sought to promote scholarship in the lower schools, it has tried to raise the standards of teaching, and it has aimed to impose better books and better laboratory requirements upon the reluctant administrators of the secondary schools. In so far as it has failed to achieve valuable results—and the amount of testimony that it has so failed is enormous—it has fallen short because of its disbelief in the utility of studying the needs, capacities, and social environment of those who are being educated. If in recent years we have witnessed some attempts at improvement, these are rather to be attributed to public demand than to any growing disposition on the part of the college itself to study these, its legitimate problems. Slowly the college is modifying its admission requirements along rational lines; slowly it is building up special departments of pedagogy; but in neither case can the friends of the college detect a co-operative attitude on the part of the faculties themselves. More commonly they seem to have responded grudgingly to a demand forced upon them from outside.

This lack of pedagogic insight on the part of the colleges manifests itself in still another direction. Historically, the chief single function of the American college, so far as practical occu-

pations are concerned, has been the preparation of teachers. More of its graduates have gone into this than into any other field. The college has undoubtedly taken pleasure in this outcome of its work and has developed a variety of agencies to facilitate the passage of its graduates into the secondary schools. But in spite of all this, it has quite persistently refused to give to these prospective workers something of the added professional training which would better equip them for their work. Until recently it could be said that the college refused to recognize that teaching in the secondary schools was a profession, in spite of the fact that its graduates were so often making of it a career. The public has been obliged to accept the graduates, giving them responsible work in the public schools, only to find that their preparation was so incomplete as to entail a large waste in the early stages of their apprenticeship.

It is not here contended, of course, that the college should be a vocational rather than a liberal-arts school; but the fact has been that, for a large proportion of its students, the college has long been in fact a professional school, but persistently refusing to complete the final stages of its professional preparation. Just now it is feared in some quarters that the development of teachers' colleges will impair the departments of liberal arts. This can hardly happen if these departments have a wise pedagogy and are ministering to general social needs. It is not inconceivable that teachers' colleges may make of the liberal-arts subjects studies which will function so much more effectively that students will elect them in preference to those organized along traditional lines.

The second main head under which we must enumerate the shortcomings of the college is that which has reference to the integration of that institution with community and national life. It is an interesting fact in social evolution that those institutions, religious, political, or educational, a large part of whose function is the conservation and transmission of the social inheritance, tend periodically to become static and to become detached from the currents of social life in which they find themselves. It would seem that after periods of social unrest the demand for

conservation and reinterpretation of the social inheritance is so great as to practically polarize the activities of religious, political, and social leaders. They seek to store, to preserve, to rearrange, and to make attractive the experience of the past, but ere long they find themselves out of the current of life and indisposed to work back into it. From one point of view this preservative function would seem to be as simple as it is valuable. The world must have custodians of its wealth of ancient culture and customs. At any time the treasure-house should be open and guides available. Society is largely made up of those who by preference or necessity press forward and who rarely take account of accumulated wisdom. The college has specialized as one institution assuming to guard and make available the social inheritance.

But in these conserving institutions there seems to be a strong and often fatal tendency to make of a means an end. Treasures may not be merely stored; they must be used. The wisdom of the past must function in the present if it is to be really worth the while. He who conserves must also see that what he holds shall be made available. To cause the social inheritance to fulfil its appointed part in the activities of the age is an art in itself. As an institution, the college tends perennially, like many other institutions, to fail to attend to the functioning side of its performance. It welcomes worshipers to its cathedrals, but neglects to study the art of preaching, and grows indolent where missionary enterprise is involved. Only by very great effort can college faculties keep themselves in touch with the environing social life. History abounds with examples of those that have failed in this way. In the American college, even in the newer departments, which in their order have been those of physical science, biological science, and social science, there has been a growing tendency on the part of the younger generation of instructors to spend their time working over and rearranging their inherited treasures, rather than in bringing them into circulation in the marts of the present.

If the college once accepts the general notion that only by the most strenuous effort and only by constant self-examination

can it keep itself in contact with modern life, we shall hear less of the conservatism and lack of vitality of that institution. This result has been achieved in certain religious movements; it is not at all impossible to college faculties. One very suggestive reason why the professional schools of the time evolve faster and seem to possess greater vitality is due to their necessity of constantly squaring up with the practical demands of the age in which they find themselves. Unfortunately we have no such searching means of testing the cultural and civic output of our colleges. We often know that their faculties are out of touch with life, that their students follow their studies perfunctorily, that their professors cannot speak to the public, and that their influence on democracy is slight. Nevertheless, the college is favored by the popular mysticism as to higher learning. Its remoteness becomes, temporarily at least, a source of strength rather than a weakness. Only after a considerable time, when the current has long swept by, does the college find itself in need of extensive readjustment. It would seem that the American college is even now entering on such a dynamic period and that within the next few years criticism and a wide range of constructive measures will be found available.

The college will perform its full mission to society only when it adds to its primitive function of being a museum and shrine of learning, its modern responsibilities of evolving a teaching-art and of deliberately seeking to keep itself in such immediate relations with the great currents of the time that it can react helpfully on them.